

A DECORATED BOX FROM SIDON

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CLAUDE **DOUMET-SERHAL** 2 a-b Rectangular bone panels.

3 The seal and one of the scarabs found in the box.

1 The box found in burial 100.

Found in the grave of a female adult, the box contained 5 scarabs (discussed by H. Loffet in this issue p. 116) and one cylinder seal. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dominique Collon for her guidance and the fruitful discussions I was able to have with her about the seal. It was she who suggested that I draw the images from the seal itself before making the impression which in fact was very difficult to read because of the numerous defects in the material. This was of great help in trying to decipher the iconography of the seal. Her enlightening suggestions including the amelioration of the dancer's descriptions have allowed me to refine my ideas on the interpretation of this very unusual example.



A box decorated with engraved flat rectangular bone panels¹ and dating to the Middle Bronze Age IIB was found in burial 100. The Sidon box served as a container ² for five egyptianizing scarabs (S/4571, 4601, 4602, 4603, 4604/6037) (see p. 116-120) and a blue faience cylinder seal ³(S/4606/6037) all of which were part of the deceased's personal belongings. The five scarabs included three which had a gold setting.

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Twenty-two bone panels decorated with single or double rows of centredot circles⁴ and incised with vertical and diagonal lines as well as a crisscross design ⁵ also found in Palestine ⁶, and more rarely in Syria, were flattened and smoothed, affixed with nails or pegs⁷, and inlaid along the sides of the

wooden box 8. Despite the recovery in situ of numerous panels it has not been possible to estimate its size nor has it been possible to undertake its reconstruction. Most of the bone strips measured between 3.0 and 5. 7 cm in length. Some were cracked in places, others were noticeably shorter. They all fall into two groups of heights ranging approximately between 0.7 and 1. 2 cm, and they vary in thickness between 0.1 cm and 1. 1 cm. Strips of incised bone inlay deco-

rated with geometric patterns are amply represented in Palestine where examples are found in MB II contexts at almost every excavated site ⁹, but only a few examples have ever been found in coastal Syria ¹⁰. Aside from the double rows of centre-dot circles and the criss-cross pattern, geometric motifs included in the Sidonian repertoire consist of longitudinal lines, diagonal lines, centre-dot circles and guilloches formed by connected concentric centre-dot circles and running spirals, but so far no silhouettes typical of the Palestinian repertoire depicting animals, birds or humans, have been found ¹¹.

Cylinder seal S/4606/6037

The blue faience cylinder seal¹² found in the box is 2. 1 cm high and 1. 3 cm in diameter. The existence of different seal workshops operating in Syria in the Late 18th and 17th centuries have been identified on the Levantine coast and Palestine by numerous scholars. This seal does not belong to either the haematite North Syrian group¹³, nor to the Green Jasper workshop¹⁴. Instead, it is comparable to a Palestinian style which developed from the linear technique employed in the engraving of scarabs during the Hyksos period ¹⁵. However, the general theme on the Sidon seal, as it is now known, is very similar to the haematite North Syrian group with a principal figure being a deity, worshipping figures and a blend of Egyptian and Anatolian motifs ¹⁶.

This principal figure (fig. 4-5) is schematized to a high degree and its facial features are drawn with a circle for the eye and a downward line veering to the right for the nose¹⁷; this technique is reminiscent of the way eyes were depicted on Early Dynastic III seals from Mesopotamia and northern Syria¹⁸. The body, also very schematic, evokes a tree trunk¹⁹ or a long garment reaching down to the ground and shown in two parts. The shoulders protrude from either side of the trunk. No arms or hands are shown; instead, from the protruding left shoulder, a hare²⁰ to the right of its neck moves from right to left ²¹. A small seated child (see below) ³², raising its right hand in front of one of the creatures, is shown with its left arm merging into its left shoulder in the same way as the animal protruding from the top of the central figure's left shoulder can probably be interpreted as wings or as rays of the sun ²³.

This central figure is flanked by two creatures depicted vertically in profile and facing each other. Both have elongated muzzles with an eye and most probably an ear or a horn rising from the back of the head. Their forelegs are attached to their torso like a horizontal V, with their paws or hands turned upwards at a right angle to the legs. They stand on one hind-leg with the other leg extended at an angle in front, as though dancing, with the feet also pointing upwards at right angles to the legs. Both have a tail. The creature on the left is leaning backwards.

The remaining space is filled with secondary motifs. Above to the left behind the creature's head is a curving line ending in what resembles the head of a cobra ²⁴. Between the creatures and the principal figure are a series of motifs including, on the left, a Horus hawk with folded

4-7 Drawings made from the photographs of the actual seal.

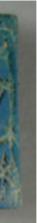


















wings wearing a double crown ²⁵ standing in a right-facing profile on a box (see below). Horus hawks are commonly represented on scarabs from the early second millennium ²⁶. What seems to be a plant emerges from the box and a small bird or hawk turned to the left is perched on it. The association of the hawk with plants is exceptional ²⁷ in Egypt. A stringed instrument is depicted before the creature on the right. This is probably either a type of "arched harp"²⁸ already found in Egypt in the Middle Kingdom but becoming more common in the New Kingdom ²⁹, or the "bow harp" attested at Choga-Mish in the late 4th millennium BC and at Mari in the mid-3rd millennium BC³⁰. On top of the instrument, in the field, is a curved stem with a forked end ³¹. Underneath the instrument is a loop, a probable sa symbol ³². One of the creatures has an ankh sign behind it and the other the djed pillar ³³ and two reclining antelopes set at a right angle to the remainder of the scene ³⁴ and following each other from the top to the bottom of the seal. Their body is depicted in a fluid undulating line very similar to the antelopes found on the seals belonging to the Green jasper workshop ³⁵. Above the ankh sign, a pillar topped by vegetal volutes ending in a double curl which is probably an early form of the "sacred tree", is comparable to pillars which support the winged disc on the first half of the 17th century Alalakh seal impressions ³⁶.

Dancing: Rhythmic dancing ³⁷ appears on Chalcolithic pottery and seals from the 5th to the 2nd millennium BC ³⁸ and the Sidon excavation has yielded an example depicting rhythmic dancing in a row of dancing men on a 3rd millennium seal impression ³⁹. The posture of the dancers on the Sidon Middle Bronze Age cylinder seal S/4606 differs from the Palestinian posture which consists of having one leg on the ground and the other leg bent at the knee ⁴⁰. Instead the Sidon creatures have one raised leg with the foot in the upright position very similar to the manner in which young girls are depicted on Egyptian wall paintings ⁴¹. Another familiar Egyptian posture is the "crossed arms" stretched forward in a horizontal V-shape. Ben Tor ⁴² discusses this arm posture, commonly found on Egyptianizing Syrian cylinder seals of the Middle Bronze Age. It normally portrays adoration or, in the Sidon case, the veneration of a deity depicted in the middle ⁴³. The position of the pad or palm raised to the front is also an Egyptian posture ⁴⁴.

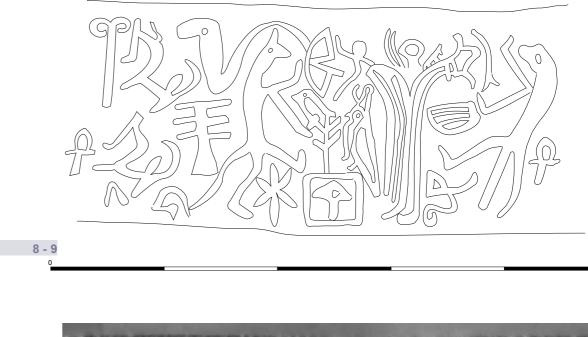
Hunting: There is a visual allusion to the hunt illustrated on this seal by the bow ⁴⁵ with a small figure raising one arm in front of it. Although hunting had ceased to be a major form of food occupation in Sidon by the 2nd millennium BC it may well have been illustrated only to perpetuate the memory of the hunter ⁴⁶.

The child figure: On Egyptianizing seals diminutive figures identified as children are closely associated with male rulers and/or their patron goddesses. The child is generally placed between the rulers and the deity and raises one arm towards the adult ⁴⁷. In the Sidon case the child with one arm raised faces one of the creatures.

8-9 Drawing of fig. 8 is taken from the impression (fig. 9) of the seal and is therefore the reverse of the drawings made from the photographs of the actual seal in fig. 4-7.

Deity: The principal figure - a deity - is depicted in the same manner as the male deity ⁴⁸ from Karum Kanesh ⁴⁹ level Ib and the lead figurine found in Oumm el Marra in Syria⁵⁰. In both cases the antelopes seem to emerge from the torso or from the shoulders underlying the theme of the god merging with the animal ⁵¹. Özgüc compares the male deity from Karum Kanesh to three other moulds from Kültepe, Bogazköy and the Yale University museum whereby the degree of schematization reaches abstraction with the right hand of the god represented by a hook-like outward extension of the raised arm ⁵². In general this master of animals of the Mesopotamian repertoire was not portrayed as a god and was not himself an object of cult. In the case of Sidon and Kültepe it is a god that is depicted with two dancing animals on either side ⁵³ with hands raised and palms to the front as a sign of respect. It remains difficult to assign a name to this god whose identity lies within the combination of symbols and before whom a dance is executed ⁵⁴ (fig. 6).

The box: The box appearing on the Sidonian seal could be interpreted as a Levantine interpretation of a *serekh* ⁵⁵ which refers to a rectangular frame surmounted by the Horus falcon with the Horus name writ-





ten in the serekh 56. On Syrian cylinder seals the box is identified as being a structure. A Syrian ivory cylinder seal in the Louvre (AO 26627), dating to the Early Dynastic period, features a box identified as a structure in which a small creature is depicted crouching facing right ⁵⁷. Amiet discusses the Louvre seal showing two creatures inside a structure, and with further creatures on the roof depicted with one raised hand as if they were addressing prayers towards the sky. On the Louvre AO 26627 seal, the worshippers are replaced by two warriors, and the cultic scene is portrayed with a less well-defined mythology of "heroes and fighting animals." According to P. Amiet, the structure is a rare motif which belongs to a specific "North Syrian ritual tradition"58. Another similar box is shown on a cylinder seal belonging to the Marcopoli Collection, with a procession, a ceremony and dance before a frontal deity ⁵⁹. One or two individuals in the structure are identified as possible deities ⁶⁰ and part of a Levantine ritual theme. The triangular head in the Sidon box is either a human being seen in profile facing left with a long neck or the name of Horus transcribed here as a triangle with a dot on a stem.

Conclusion

The Sidon cylinder seal reflects a novel creativity. It deserves attention in that it has provenance and it does not belong to workshops identified in either Syria proper or on the coast or even in Palestine ⁶¹ but rather reflects a new dynamic artistic production of the then contemporary Sidonian society. With the numerous Egyptianizing filling motifs, the dancing posture of the creatures and the position of their arms with their close parallels in Egyptian portrayals of protection and adoration 62, the Sidon seal compares to the southern Palestinian group⁶³ in that both fall heavily under Egyptian influence and both are carved in a distinctive linear style⁶⁴. The scene portrayed on the Sidon cylinder seal is of a cultic nature in which the principal figure is a deity with worshipping figures - a composition very similar to those on some seals of the North Syrian cylinder seal group ⁶⁵. The combination of Syro-Anatolian ⁶⁶ and Egyptian symbols accompanying the deity were absorbed by Sidon's artisans who integrated and reinterpreted all of them, creating their own single distinctive style and thus revealing the extraordinary extent of the circulation of images along the Levantine coast.

This seal and the Egyptianizing scarabs, all dating to the end of the twelfth and beginning of the 13th dynasty around 1750 BC, were deposited in a box and placed in the constructed grave of a high ranking woman at the beginning of Middle Bronze Age IIB. On the basis of the dating of the scarabs, of the pottery which is currently still under study and of the stratigraphy which shows that the burial was cut from Sidon's level 5, the cylinder seal, which may well have been in use for some time, was deposited in the grave around 1700/1680 BC.

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NOTES For a much more elabo-

rate decorated box from Hazor containing 10 cylinder seals, see A. Ben-Tor, 2009, p. 5-6.

A. Ben Tor, 2009, p. 51.
B. Parker, 1949, p. 4, "The earliest specimen of the Syrian group, assigned to a Hyksos context by Rowe, is dated even earlier by Schaeffer (1900-1750 BC)."
K. M. Kenyon, 1960, fig. 203, tomb H 6; K. M. Kenyon, 1965, fig. 244, 6.

5 K. M. Kenyon, 1960, fig. 172, 3, tomb J 9 and fig. 203, 2, 8, 9, fig. 222-223; K. M. Kenyon, 1965, fig. 244, 1.

6 W. F. Albright, 1938, p. 49, pl. 36, str. E & D.

P. R. S. Moorey, 1999, p.
 127.
 B. Ben-Shlomo & T.

Dothan, 2006, p. 5. 9 H. A. Liebowitz, 1977, p.

90-91.10For an example in theLate Bronze Age see, J. Gachet-Bizollon, 2007, pl. 43, 371, p.

298, on ivory in Ugarit.
11 H. A. Liebowitz, 1977, p.
92.

12 D. Collon, 2008, p. 95 on the miniature faience stamp seals dated between 1800-1740 BC and which fall into two groups according to their geographical distribution and shape, the northern examples and p. 96 the southern group from Palestine.

 13
 D. Collon, 1985, p. 57

 65; for the different workshops in the Middle Bronze Age, see D.

 Collon, 1981, p. 33-35, P. Amiet,

 1992, p. 25; O. Keel, 1995, p. 93.

 14
 D. Collon, 1986, p. 57

 70; D. Collon, 2004, p. 91-100.

 15
 O. Keel, 2006, p. 65 and

 79.

16 O. Keel, 2006, p. 62-63;
B. Teissier, 1994, p. 232.
17 D. Collon, 1987,fig. 87, 91, 93.

18 I thank Dominique Collon for drawing my attention to this,

D. Collon, 1987, fig. 87, 91, 93. 10 P. Amiet, 1973, p. 94, on the tree-gods in Mesopotamia. The antelope can be 90 replaced by the hare without a change in the meaning, see R. Tefnin, 1990, p. 313. 21 Compare a stone mould from Kültepe Level Ib: T. Özgüç, 1979, fig. 2, p. 293-294. 22 D. Collon, 1995, p. 24. 23 P. Amiet, 1973, p. 76, 89. 24 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 95, 2 ", "divine cobras", 181. See O. Tufnell, 1984, pl. XLII (Jericho) in a linear style and pl. XLIV, 2761, from Ajjul p. 137 for scarabs with standing humans holding a cobra depicted similarly to the Sidon seal with a long tail. 25 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 150, 151, 185. O. Tufnell, 1984, pl. IX, 26 1464, for example from Tell el Ajjul. 27 See B. Teissier, 1996, p. 13 and 31. R. D. Anderson. 1995, p. 28 2561; A. Caubet, 1996, p. 13; A. Spycket, 1984, p. 39-40. 29 R. D. Anderson, 1995, p. 2561-2562; R. D. Anderson, 1976, p. 72. D. Collon, 2010, p. 47 30 and 51; M. Marcetteau, 2010, p. 69 and 73-75. 31 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 166 for floral motifs ending in a waslike forked end. For similar very stylised floral motifs on scarabs see O. Tufnell, 1984, pl. XL II, A, 2695 and pl. XLV, A, 2782 from

Ajjul. 32 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 107, 192.

33 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 161, 58, for the Djed pillar, the hieroglyph of duration and stability, p. 181; for the ankh sign, see B. Teissier, 1996, p. 158-159, 180; for a general comment, B. Teissier, 1996, p. 104, 107, 34 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 81, 135; p. 106, 217; D. Collon, 2004, p. 352, fig. 1: 1; p. 354, fig. 5: 2. 35 D. Collon, 1986, in the Green Jasper Workshop, the animals are facing up, n° 2, 5, 8, 9 16, 18, 23 whereas on the Sidon seal they are facing down; see also p.

61.

36 D. Collon, 1975, p. 45
and note 2, fig. 76 and p. 194195, the standard on sealing 76.
37 M. Matoušová-Rajmová,

2000, p. 171-178. 38 D. Stein, 2006, p. 29.

39 C. Doumet-Serhal, 2009, p. 8-9.

40 A. Ben Tor, 2009, p. 23, fig. 11 A4.

41 P. Spencer, 2003, p. 113, top scene from the tomb of Intef at Dra Abu'l Naga.

42 A. Ben Tor, 2009, p. 27.

43 For the position of the arms D. Collon also suggests a comparison with Nephtys and Isis; see B. Teissier, 1996, p. 140, 27, p. 175 and p. 195; B. Teissier, p. 55, On Isis and Nephtys on either side of a Pharaoh-like figure on Middle Bronze Age seals is very significant, for to date winged anthropomorphic females with characteristics of Isis and Nephtys have not been attested in Middle Kingdom Egypt.

44 C. Doumet-Serhal, 1992, p. 144.

45 D. Collon, 1984, p. 54, The bow is not particularly at home in Mesopotamia where it occurs in the Uruk, Akkadian and Neo Assyrian periods. The bow distribution centre was Syria-Palestine... It disappears completely from its former centre of distribution in the 4th millennium BC but this is precisely when the composite bow appears in Mesopotamia; p. 55, the bow as a prerogative of royalty; D. Collon, 1995, p. 24.

46 P. Amiet, 1995, p. 490, Uruk IV.

47 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 78 and 142.

48 T. Özgüç, 1979, p. 296.

49 D. Collon, 2008, p. 98-99... the surviving evidence for the existence of a Levantine trade route south of Kültepe consists of seals.

50 R. Tefnin, 1990, p. 312. 51 R. Tefnin, 1990, p. 313; for a composite figure compare the lion-armed demon with human torso from the Early

York, p. 2555-2568.

Dynastic period connected to some mythological concept: E. Porada, 1948, p. 11, fig. 61.

59 K. Emre, 1971, p. 135. 53 P. Amiet, 1997, p. 323; On another seal with a dance before a frontal deity, see D. Collon, 1987, fig. 755, p. 164, period IId.

54 Assigning a name to this deity, whose identity is a combination of symbols signifying different aspects of a divinity remains uncertain. Many suggestions have been discussed by Tefnin, 1990, p. 312, highlighting the god Amurru because of the presence of the antelope which, however, is absent from the Syrian milieu, or Reshef and Athtar, for the regeneration of vegetation or the interesting replacement of the antelope by the hare which is held by the mountain god and which has relations with the moon. The important aspect here, however, is the close association between deity and animals in a compositional scheme resembling that of the master of animals. 55 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 90 and 91, 2e & 167. 56 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 91, 2e, 167: I. Shaw & P. Nicholson, 1995, p. 261. 57 P. Amiet, 1993, p. 261.

58 P. Amiet, 1993, p. 261. 59 D. Collon, 1987, p. 165. 60 D. Collon, 1987, fig. 755, period II d (3000-2334 BC); P. Amiet, 1963, p. 73, fig. 23; P. Amiet, 1995, p. 500. D. Collon, 1986, p. 62, 61 the Green Jasper workshop in Byblos; B. Teissier, 1994, p. 232, "I wish to argue even more strongly than O. Keel and D. Collon, that some cylinders were made in

Palestine during the later Middle Bronze Age II B-C even though scarabs were the dominant seal form...".

62 A. Ben Tor, 2009, p. 54. 63 D. Collon, 2008, p. 96. 64 See O. Keel, 1995 p. 95, fig. 4-5.

O. Keel, 2006, p. 62. For 65 examples, see A. Otto 2000, n° 157-9, 329, 340, 342, 355, 357. Note that Otto uses the term "North Syrian" to designate one of many specific geographical areas, and the centralised scheme is not confined to any particular part of Syria. The locally made Canaanite scarabs which are mostly provenanced, dating to between 1800-1740 BC fall according to D. Collon into two groups, the northern and the southern, thus reflecting the Egyptian sphere of influence, D. Collon, 2008, p. 95-96. 66 D. Collon, 2008, p. 98-99, it is clear that we have much to learn about Cappadocian trade radiating from Kültepe in various directions.

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31.

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